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TWO
Useful Cases
RESOLVED.

I. Whether a Certainty of being in a State of Salvation be attainable?

II. What is the Rule by which this Certainty is to be attained?

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BIBLIOTECA·BODLEIANA·

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Uſeful Caſes
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COuld we look into the hearts of moſt men, we ſhould find ſome ſuch reaſonings as theſe, ſoothing them in their Vices, and lulling them aſleep while they are in the ready road to Deſtruction. All men commit ſome ſins or others, and moſt men ſuch as my ſelf, or as great in another kind; and yet they believe they ſhall not be miſerable hereafter: And therefore why ſhould I, notwithſtanding my ſins, deſpair of Gods favour? why ſhould not I hope that the Infinite Mercy of God will extend it ſelf to me alſo? But then, if his Conſcience tells him, that doubtleſs Millions have had hopes of Heaven, that never came thither; and then puts the Queſtion to him, What aſſurance, what certainty have you that this ſhall not be your own caſe? He ſtraitway replies, aſſurance indeed I have none; but that I do not expect: for how ſhould fallible man know certainly how God will deal with him? but I am told that Chriſt dy'd for ſinners, and that the Mercy of God is great; on that therefore will I depend. And ſo he goes on very comfortably in his

Swearing, his Damning, his Drinking, his Cheating, or whatever other common Vices he is guilty of; and ſo Hopes himſelf into Damnation. But now theſe men, if they have any real concern for eternal happineſs, (as I hope ſome of them have, by their conſcientiouſneſs in other particulars) if they did believe they could come to a certain knowledge of their ſpiritual condition, I cannot think but that their Conſciences would not let them be at reſt under ſuch anſwers as theſe: Chriſt dy'd for ſinners; and the mercy of God is great; which the moſt profligate wretches have in their mouths as well as they. No! their Conſciences would be often asking them, Whether the omiſſion of this or that duty be conſiſtent with a ſtate of Salvation? Whether a reverence of Gods Name; whether Sobriety and Honeſty, and whatever elſe is commanded in the Goſpel, be not the indiſpenſable terms of everlaſting Salvation? And ſo they would by degrees be brought to the conſideration of all their ways, and an examination of all the particular actions of their lives, till by growing daily in grace, they grew up *to the perfect man in Chriſt Jeſus.* And then, O the Joy! O the Comfort! O the ſerenity of mind they would then experience! With what aſſurance, with what confidence would they approach the Throne of Grace? in the words of *Simeon* in the Goſpel. *Lord now letteſt thou thy Servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have ſeen thy Salvation.* And when they perceive their diſſolution drawing near, with what Alacrity? and with what tranſport of Joy would they break out into the Apoſtles words? *I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith; henceforth is laid up for me a Crown of Righteouſneſs.*

You ſee how naturally this opinion of the attainableneſs of a certain knowledge of our ſpiritual ſtate, tends

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to a virtuous and holy life. But to prevent miſtakes, I deny not, but that many men who think it impoſſible to frame a certain judgment of their ſtate to Godwards, are very watchful and cautious in all their ways, carefully avoiding all thoſe things that ſeem to have any contrariety to the will of God. But I ſay this their opinion is not ſo apt to produce a good life, as its contrary. For the generality of men when they are once perſuaded that with all their care and induſtry they can never come to a certainty, they are ready to caſt off all diligence, and follicitude about the conduct of their lives; and to rely on the Indefinite Mercy of God, and to hope the beſt, by which means their ſins and the vicious examples of the world grow upon them; and their Hope, the beſt knowledge they think they can attain to, ſuffers them to go on in their ſins, without much interruption and diſturbance.

Nay, it may be reaſonably preſumed, that many of the good men of this perſuaſion have a ſtronger aſſurance than their modeſty and humility will ſuffer them to utter: For, what fears? what anxieties? what racking thoughts muſt pierce their minds, who have the leaſt doubt or ſcruple in a matter wherein they are everlaſtingly concerned? What horrours? what anguiſh muſt rend and divide their Souls upon their death-beds, who know not but that the next moment they muſt paſs into that Lake of Fire and Brimſtone that burneth for ever?

And this has been the caſe of many a pious and good man: For the holy Biographers acquaint us with what hideous doubtings & terrours of conſcience ſome of their Saints and Worthies have departed this life: and they did ſo, 'tis likely, for no other reaſon, but becauſe a future ſtate being then more lively and nearly repreſented

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to them, they had not been able in their health to frame a fixed and ſettled judgment, whether theirs ſhould be a ſtate of Happineſs, or eternal Miſery.

Now, ſince the framing a certain judgment of our preſent ſpiritual ſtate is a thing of ſo great uſe towards our leading godly, righteous, and ſober lives, and of ſo great comfort to them that do ſo, both in their life-time and on their death-bed, I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, That men may make a certain judgment of themſelves, whether they are in a ſtate of Salvation.

Secondly, I ſhall lay down the Rule, by which they may make this judgment of themſelves.

I know that many good and holy men are of opinion that no man can without great pride, arrogance, and preſumption, ſay, That he is certain of his Salvation, ſhould he die that moment: for they think the many woful and deliberate faults we are all guilty of; the innumerable ſecret ones that have eſcaped our knowledge; the wandrings and coldneſs in our Devotions; the ill thoughts that many times ariſe in our minds, and the imperfectneſs of our beſt actions: Theſe, and ſuch-like conſiderations, they think, are ſufficient to confound the moſt confident, and to baffle all pretences to an aſſurance. And they are ready to ſay, that they who are ſo certain of their going to Heaven, by the immodeſty of their perſuaſions ſeem to be fartheſt from it. But if this certainty be attainable; nay, if it be our duty to attain it; if it be a Doctrine plainly delivered in the holy Scriptures, and therein practiſed by the holy men of God; he muſt be a very timerous man that will be ſcar'd out of ſo uſeful and comfortable a truth by harſh cenſures, and ill-grounded reproaches.

Theſe

Theſe Objections ſhall be duly weighed afterwards.

I. But *firſt*, let us conſider what the Scriptures ſay to my firſt Propoſition, That men may, if they will deal impartially with themſelves, know certainly whether they are in a ſtate of Salvation. St. *John*, who wrote againſt the *Gnoſticks* vain pretences to Knowledge, and ſpiritual illuminations, could not fall into the ſame fault himſelf by pretending to a knowledge that was not plain and obvious. And it is he that has told us, in his *firſt Epiſtle*, ch. 3. v. 10. that *the Children of the Devil are manifeſt*. Now, who calls that manifeſt, which no man has a certainty of? or who can think that the wicked man ſhould have a certain knowledge of his deplorable condition, and that the good and juſt man has not the comfort of knowing that he is in a ſafe one? The ſame Apoſtle tells us in the ſame verſe, that *the Children of God are manifeſt, as well as the Children of the Devil.* And in v. 14. of the ſame ch. ſpeaking of the faithful in general, he ſays, *We know that we are tranſlated from death to life, becauſe we love the brethren.* That is, v. 16. with ſuch a love as *will make us lay down our lives for them.* And v. 24. *Hereby know we that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.* That is, by the fruits of the Spirit that appear in our lives. Again, *By this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: and he that keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.* Now, what reaſon is there for any man to doubt of his own Salvation, who knows that he is tranſlated from death to life, who knows that he is the Son of God, who knows that the love of God is perfected in him? None certainly! for the ſame Apoſtle has told us, *If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*

Now, the pretending uncertainty after ſuch clearneſs of evidence, would better become the *Pagan Sceptick*, than the *truly humble and modeſt Chriſtian.*

In the next place let us ſee what St. *Paul* ſays to this point. In the 5*th*. ch. of the 2*d*. *Epiſt*. to the *Cor*. 1 v. he ſpeaks of himſelf thus: *For we know that if our earthly houſe of this Tabernacle were diſſolved, we have a building of God, a houſe not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens*. Again in the 2*d*. *Epiſt*. to *Timothy*, and in the 4th. ch. how unconceivable was his joy, which broke out into theſe words? *I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteouſneſs, which the Lord the Righteous Judge ſhall give me in that day*, &c. Could theſe words be uttered by a man that had the leaſt doubt, whether his life was agreeable to the will of God, or that he ſhould not receive that eternal weight of Glory, the reward of an holy life? If, after this evidence from the New Teſtament, we look backwards into the Old, we ſhall find good King *Hezekiah* ſo well ſatisfied in his own integrity and ſincerity, that when he was a dying (and then we know that doubts and ſcruples are moſt apt to ariſe) he durſt call upon God to take a view of his paſt life; *Remember now, O Lord, I beſeech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy ſight*. Likewiſe we may obſerve *David* in the 17 and 18 *Pſalms*, full of aſſurance and confidence, as to his own Righteouſneſs, and future reward of it. *As for me, I ſhall behold thy face in Righteouſneſs: I ſhall be ſatisfied when I awake with thy likeneſs. I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from God: Therefore hath the Lord recompenſed me according to my righteouſneſs, according to the cleanneſs of my hands in his eye-ſight*. I will not tire you with the examples of *Job*, *Nehemiah*, and other holy men, that have expreſſed the like confidence of their own Holineſs and Sincerity.

Nor

Nor is this aſſurance and confidence the peculiar priviledge of theſe extraordinary perſons. For beſides what you have already read out of St. *John* concerning all true Chriſtians in general; and beſides that the foremention'd holy men grounded their aſſurance on the ſenſe they had of their own Integrity an Sincerity; 'tis plain from Scripture, that all perſons may, nay ought to arrive to this certainty. For are we not told, *Gal.* 5. *That the fruits of the Spirit*, which all true Chriſtians have, and are guided by, *are Peace and Joy?* And St. *Peter*, in the 1. ch. of his 1. *Epiſt.* tells the faithful he writes to: *In whom*, that is, in Chriſt, *though you ſee him not, yet believing, ye rejoyce with joy unſpeakable.* Now, what Joy, what Peace can there be to thoſe who heartily believe a future life, when they the leaſt doubt that Chriſt, when they ſhall appear before him, ſhall prove an enraged Judge, inſtead of a merciful Saviour? What perſon can conceive an unſpeakable joy at the conſideration of him, whom he knows not but the next minute he may pronounce the ſentence on him of, *Go you curſed into everlaſting Fire?* Beſides, we are bid to *give thanks to him, and praiſe him*, as well as to rejoyce in him. But how can any man perform theſe duties from his heart, who is in an uncertainty as to his future Eſtate? For certainly thoſe Mercies cannot be the Object of our unfeigned Praiſes and Thankſgivings, if we have reaſon to fear they do not appertain to us.

But were there not one Precept or Example in the whole *Bible* to prove this point, methinks the natural uſe of Conſcience might be ſufficient to clear it, unleſs we dare ſay that God has given us Conſciences only to laſh and torment us; for peace and comfort they could not give any reaſonable and conſidering man, while there remains any doubt that he ſhall periſh everlaſting-

ly: and ſo the beſt of men would be Furies to themſelves while living, whatever becomes of them when dead.

I know there are many ready to ask, whether the moſt confident man in this perſuaſion would be willing on his death-bed to declare his aſſurance of his Salvation, and with ſuch words in his mouth to breathe his laſt? But in anſwer to this, beſides that what a man would *chooſe to do* is one thing, and what certainly a good man *may attain to* is another: Beſides this, I ſay, he would tell you, that as he had lived in the practice of all Chriſtian Virtues, ſo he would willingly die in the practice of the greateſt; the pardoning others, and begging Gods pardon for himſelf. He would tell you, that Humility, as it was the conſtant duty of a Chriſtian, ſo it more eſpecially became him when a ſtepping into the preſence of God, & that he would therefore willingly depart with his eyes and heart towards Heaven, humbly imploring the Divine Mercy. And that among other reaſons he was therefore certain that he ſhould obtain it, becauſe he asked *in Faith*, becauſe he in no ways doubted, but that he was a proper Object of it.

As for the Objections that may be made againſt this Doctrine of aſſurance, they will either be obviated, or beſt anſwered, when I have handled my ſecond propoſition. For if a certain Rule may be laid down, whereby a man may judge infallibly of his Spiritual ſtate, few will be troubled with the Objections. For their greateſt force lies in the want of a clear Rule to guide us in our judgment. And therefore I haſten to the giving the Rule, by which a holy man may certainly judge of his Spiritual good eſtate, or the ill man may put himſelf into a good one.

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II. The Rule conſiſts of theſe three parts:

Firſt, The committing of no ſin, though in violence of paſſion, that is heinous in its Object; ſuch as Blaſphemy, Raſh Swearing, Perjury, Idolatry, Murther, Curſing, Adultery, Fornication, and the like.

Or, *Secondly*, let the Object be never ſo ſmall, the committing no ſin that is heinous in its Cauſe; ſuch as are all ſins that are committed wilfully and deliberately; that is, when we both know they are againſt the Commands of God, and conſider they are ſo, at the time of committing them; or we might have both known and conſidered this, if we had not been highly wanting to our ſelves; ſo that our Ignorance and our Inconſideration was voluntary, and ſo is the ſin by conſequence that proceeds from theſe: which, in the Phraſe of the Schools, is, *being voluntary or deliberate in its cauſe.*

Thirdly, If we have been guilty of the fore-mentioned ſins, the repenting of them in ſuch a meaſure as we are ſure will be accepted by our good and gracious God, in and through the merits of our Bleſſed Saviour. How and when we may be ſure that our Repentance is accepted, I ſhall ſhew afterwards.

This being the Rule by which men may judge of their Spiritual ſtate, that they may have a ſerious regard to it, and depend on it with ſafety, I account my ſelf obliged to do theſe three things:

Firſt, To prove that nothing leſs than the obſerving of the three parts of this my Rule, can give us any juſt aſſurance of Salvation.

Secondly, That the parts of this Rule, if obſerved, are ſufficient to put any man into a ſtate of Salvation.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That it is plain and eaſie, ſuch as all Rules ought to be, ſuch as any man of common ſenſe may eaſily and ſecurely apply to himſelf.

I. *Firſt* then, *That nothing leſs than the obſerving of the three parts of my Rule can give us any juſt aſſurance of Salvation.*

1. As for thoſe ſins that are heinous in their Object, they are ſo contrary to the firſt dictates of the light of Nature, or are ſo repugnant to the expreſs Commands of God, that no man could poſſibly fall into them, who for any time immediately before had conſcientiouſly diſcharged his duty, and had had a ſerious regard to the Laws of God: and he that has not had this regard, he was in ſuch a wretched and hardened ſtate, that his caſe had been deſperate without the addition of any of theſe grievous Crimes. Let the provocation be never ſo great, and the paſſion never ſo ſtrong, where there is any tolerable degree of tenderneſs in the Conſcience, it could not but with-hold the perſon from villanies ſo oppoſite to his plain duty to God and Man, and that in the higheſt inſtances of it. I know that there have been, and there are many men of fair Characters in the world, that have committed one or other of theſe Crimes; but aſſuredly they ow'd their Religion, as their Cloaths, to the faſhion: It was *that* which put it on them; their Juſtice, their Loyalty, and all their Morality in their other actions, was nothing but the Gallantry of the Age, or Self-intereſt: the fear of God, if ever they knew it, was dead and rotten in them, or elſe ſuch ſtench and filthineſs could never have come out of them. But to paſs from theſe heinous Indeliberate Crimes, if they are capable of being Indeliberate; for I much doubt whether any Chriſtians Conſcience is ſo ſlow and ſtupid,

ſtupid, as at the time of doing them not immediately to admoniſh him, not to ſtare in his face, and tell him, that he is a daſhing himſelf againſt the Natural or the Revealed will of God. And if his Conſcience told him ſo much, then certainly they were done with conſideration and deliberation. And had he ſtaid a month or a year before the perpetration of them, his Conſcience might have ſuggeſted other Arguments, but not greater, nor more proper to diſſuade him. 'Tis true, Time 'tis probable would have abated the ſtrength of his paſſion. But no man is virtuous for not having a temptation, but for reſiſting it; nor is he a true Chriſtian, that does not reſiſt the greateſt. But enough has been ſaid to ſhew ſuch heinous Crimes, however committed, to be inconſiſtent with Salvation, eſpecially with a Security of it.

2. And ſo I paſs (as I ſaid) to wilful and deliberate ſins; ſuch as we know to be ſins, and at the time of committing them recollect that they are ſo. And theſe alſo, nay one act of theſe, let them be never ſo ſmall, very much endanger a mans Salvation; for the *Popiſh Caſuiſts*, by their diſtinction of ſins Venial into ſins Light in their Nature, though acted willingly, ſuch as Fooliſh Jeſting, Officious Lying, ſmall Exceſſes, and the like; and Light in their Object, ſuch as ſtealing a Pin, a Farthing, or any Trifle: By theſe diſtinctions, I ſay, they make the Salvation of their followers very doubtful, if they do not utterly deſtroy it. And it is Security and Aſſurance that I contend for. Now, can the allowing ones ſelf in diſobedience to any of the commands of God, conſiſt with an Obedience to him *with all our heart, and with all our ſoul?* Can he that deliberately breaks the leaſt of the Commands, aſſure himſelf that he ſhall not be the leaſt in *the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, not be

be at all admitted into it? Can that Soul that ſinneth preſumptuouſly, though in never ſo ſmall a matter, be certain that he *reproacheth not the Lord, and that he ſhall not be cut off?* contrary to *Numb.* 15. 30 v. He that will not part with theſe *handfuls of barley and morſels of bread*, for his duty to God, ſeems to have but little deſire of Heaven, and I am affraid will have leſs of it for his Portion. But to leave theſe miſerable Guides of Souls, that thus unwarily endeavour to widen the *narrow way* that leads to life, till they fall into the *broad road* that leadeth to deſtruction: For the indulging ones ſelf in the ſmaller ſins, leſſens the fear of God, and the habit of doing well, and ſo draws us into more and greater ſins. But leaving theſe miſerable Guides, I ſhall betake my ſelf more cloſely to the proof of the ſecond part of my Rule, *viz.*

That one deliberate ſin will endanger our eternal happineſs. I might ſay, will certainly deſtroy it; but that is more than I am engaged to prove at preſent.

Does not St. *Paul* in his 1 *Ep.* to the *Cor.* 6 ch. tell us, that *neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with Mankind, nor Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, ſhall inherit the Kingdom of God.* Some, I know, diſpute, whether a ſingle, though deliberate act, can give us one of theſe denominations? In moſt of them 'tis own'd it will; but why it ſhould not in all, in the ſight of God, I can ſee no reaſon. But that this pretence may not deceive us, we are told by the ſame Apoſtle in the 5 to the *Gal.* ſpeaking of the works of the fleſh, *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, Laſciviouſneſs, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Hereſies, Envyings, Murthers, Drunkenneſs*, and *ſuch-*

ſuch-like. We are told, that *thoſe that do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.* Now theſe words, *They which do ſuch things,* relate to ſingle Actions, as well as to Habits; and the doers of theſe things are debarred the Kingdom of Heaven. And then the *ſuch-like* that follows this long Catalogue of ſins, ſhews that it is not only theſe ſpecies of ſins, but the reſt, which fall under the denomination of ſin, which it would have been endleſs to have enumerated, are ſubject to the like dreadful penalty. And there is good reaſon to believe it, for in the *firſt Epiſtle* of St. *John,* ch. 3. v. 6. we are told, *Whoſoever abideth in God, ſinneth not:* and verſe 8. *If he does, he is no longer a Child of God, but of the Devil.* Accordingly, ſin is defined by the Schoolmen to be *an averſion from God, and a cleaving to the Creature.* Now, that the Apoſtle means ſingle acts as well as habits, is plain from the expreſſion it ſelf, *He that ſinneth,* which is applicable to acts as well as habits, and from the deſign of the Apoſtle in writing this Epiſtle, which was to diſſuade men from all ſin, ch. 2. v. 1. *Theſe things write I unto you, that you ſin not.* Now, who will offer to ſay that the Apoſtles deſign was not to diſſuade from ſingle acts as well as habits? And yet he ſaith, *He that ſinneth, is of the Devil;* that is, voluntarily and deliberately, as I ſhall make appear afterwards. Beſides, let us conſider that under the old Law *Saul* was cut off for ſparing an *Agag* and the fat Beaſt againſt the expreſs Command of God; let us conſider that that man that but once carried a bundle of Sticks on the Sabbath-day, was put to death without mercy, and that there was no expiation allow'd for ſins, how ſmall ſoever the object was, if committed knowingly and willingly; but in the words of St. *James,*

c. 2. *He that was guilty of one point, was guilty of all.* Not that he formally broke every Command, but that the event was the ſame; he was as certainly puniſhed with death; as if he had violated every particular. And this with good reaſon; for in ſo doing he ſinned againſt That which only could engage him to the obſervance of the whole, the Love of God, and an earneſt deſire to pleaſe him.

If this was the ſeverity of the *Jewiſh Law*, and *every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received the juſt recompence of reward, and the wilful offender died without Mercy: how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great means of Salvation?* which has been brought down to us, not by Angels, as the *Moſaical* Law was, but by the Son of God. This is not mine, but the Apoſtles Argument, in his Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, and the other was made by St. *James* himſelf, and therefore they are the more carefully to be heeded.

I fore-ſee that there are many who will not eaſily be perſuaded to think ſo hardly of one wilful ſin, (for 'tis a troubleſom thing to be condemned by ones own Conſcience) and that therefore they will interpoſe as to the Arguments drawn from the Old Law; That no man, unleſs he dies in the very moment of committing a wilful ſin, is immediately damned for it, as they were immediately put to Death under the Old Law for one wilful tranſgreſſion: for the Grace of the Goſpel has brought an Expiation for the moſt grievous crimes, and ſhewed us a way by Repentance to avoid their puniſhment. But all that I urged the former paſſages for, was to ſhew, That the Goſpel teaches us, that to every

every wilful diſobedience, to the guilt of any one point now, Eternal death is as certainly due in the next Life, as a Temporal one among the *Jews* was due in this. And that therefore all perſons ought as carefully to avoid every wilful offence under the Goſpel, as the *Jews* were obliged to avoid every wilful tranſgreſſion of their Law; in which the Penalty was not ſo great, nor was the Diſcovery ſo certain. As for the refuge of Repentance which is allow'd now againſt an Eternal death, and was not ordinarily allow'd the *Jews* againſt a Temporal one, of this under my next Head: But if we make the Grace of the Goſpel an inlet to our ſins, we highly provoke Gods Juſtice by thus abuſing his Mercy; And when we make uſe of it to take off the force, not of mine, but the two Apoſtles Arguments, we are not followers of their Doctrine, but of our own deceitful Luſts, and carnal Reaſonings.

Beſides theſe reaſons from Scripture, there is a Natural one, and that a very great one, that ſhews the danger that is in every wilful ſin. The General Rules of our duty relating either to God, our Neighbour, or our ſelves, are ſuch as tend to our Profit and our Intereſt, to our Credit and Reputation, to our Prudent Pleaſure, and our Health; And then he that looks no farther than this life, if diſcreet, would carefully obſerve them. And therefore the ordinary obſervance of our duty, cannot diſtinguiſh us from ſuch a perſon as this, nor give us a ſecurer title to happineſs than the *Children of this world* have, *that are wiſe in their Generation.* But ſometimes it falls out, and that perhaps to try us, that in particular inſtances our Duty inter-

feres with our Profit, our Credit, or our Eaſe. And then we have the greateſt opportunities of experiencing whether our hearts are ſound towards God; Then is our day of trial; Then may we know whether we *love God with all our hearts*, and whether we are willing to *forſake Father or Mother, Brother or Siſter*, whatever is moſt dear to us, for the ſake of our Bleſſed Saviour. If in theſe caſes we fail of our duty, and prefer our preſent concerns before the Commands of God, the Devil may juſtly ſay, *'tis not for nought that we ſerved God, Job* 1. 9. We purſued our worldly Intereſts, while we flattered our ſelves we ſerved the Lord. And then who can ſafely depend on ſuch an obedience, as is thus liable to be reproached by his Accuſer?

I know it may be objected, That a Reverend Divine has told us in his Directions how we may judge of our Spiritual ſtate, *That if the General courſe of our Actions be a doing of Righteouſneſs, though we are ſometimes born down by the Violence of Temptations, the Grace of the Goſpel accepts of this Imperfect, but Sincere Obedience.*

But (1.) What Aſſurance does he give, that this will be ſufficient to any mans Salvation? He ſays, that an Unſinning Obedience is impoſſible, and that therefore ſomewhat leſs than a perfect Obedience is neceſſary, (if any man is ſaved.) But is there no Medium betwixt a Perfect Obedience, and that in the General courſe of our lives? Does not That Obedience which is ſpotted only with ſins of Infirmity, and which keeps the good Chriſtian from all Wilful and Deliberate Sins, come nearer to an Unſinning Obedience, than

than that which is ſometimes born down by the Violence of Temptations?

(2*dly.*) This Rule is not clear enough to direct any man in ſo weighty a matter; For what one man calls Obedience as to the General courſe of our Actions, another will not call ſo. And he that is but ſometimes Drunk, and Cheats but now and then, and is but ſeldom guily of Fornication, or any other ſin, may comfortably commit them, ſo that he does not turn them into an Habitual Practice. And I verily believe, ſhould I appeal to moſt mens Conſciences, that are not extremely Vicious, they would confeſs, that they ſlacken the reins now and then to a Delightful Luſt, or a Profitable Sin, becauſe they are of Opinion, that if in the Generality of their Actions they obſerve their Duty, theſe not common Intermiſſions, will not endanger their Salvation.

I think I need not oppoſe Authority againſt Authority, ſince the Uncertainty and Looſeneſs of the Rule is ſufficient to confute it. And if the Arguments by which I have proved the danger that is in every Wilful Sin, be Good, This Rule muſt needs be Deceitful and Erroneous.

As for the other Species of Wilful Sins, that are Wilful in their Cauſe, when we have neglected ſuch means of Knowledge as were conſiſtent with our Circumſtances, and ſo choſen our Ignorance; or when we had time and leiſure to have conſider'd our actions before we did them, but we would run raſhly and inconſiderately upon them. Such Ignorance and Inconſideration

deration are ſo far from excuſing an Action, that they highly aggravate it. They are marks that our Spirit is ſtrangely alienated from God; They ſhew that we love Darkneſs more than Light, and that we regard not the conforming our Actions to the Commands of God; That we would *not conſider our ways, leſt we ſhould turn our feet unto his Teſtimonies.* And what will be the effect of ſuch groſs Heedleſneſs and affected Ignorance, I leave every mans own Conſcience to tell him.

Give me leave to back what I have delivered on this Head, with the Authority of the *Whole Duty of Man*, a Book deſervedly in moſt peoples hands. *Chap.* 6. *Sect.* 21. we are told, *That whoſoever continues in any one Wilful Sin, is not in Gods favour, nor can he, if he ſo die, hope for any mercy at his hand.*

But now the man that is conſcious to himſelf of any Wilful Sin, is ready to ſay in his heart, Though every Wilful Sin is Damnable, yet is it not ſo to them that have forſaken it, 'tis not ſo upon Repentance, and That I have performed, and therefore this terrible Diſcourſe does not affect me. And bleſſed for evermore be the Infinite Mercy of our Gracious God, that has declared his readineſs to receive the Returning Prodigal, to receive us to Pardon, though we have ſinn'd with an high hand, and Preſumptuouſly rebelled againſt Him; That has extended his Expiatory Sacrifice, not only to our Sins of Ignorance and Infirmity, as under the Old Law, but to our Sins againſt our Knowledge, to our Voluntary and Preſumptuous Sins.

(3*dly.*) But

(3*dly.*) But this confident perſon, that has lately been guilty of one Wilful Sin, muſt be told, That before he can give Peace and Quiet to his Soul, he ought to be certain that his Repentance has been of ſuch a nature, and in ſuch meaſure, as will be accepted with God; which is the Third part of my Rule, *by which a man may judge of his Spiritual State.*

But he that has lately been guilty of One Wilful Sin, cannot be ſure that his Repentance is accepted by God. For though he may be ſenſible of his fault, and the danger it has brought him into; though he has ſeveral times begg'd Gods pardon, and, if he be of a ſoft and tender temper, with groans and tears too; though he has made ſatisfaction and reſtitution for whatever injury he has done by his ſin, (all which particulars are abſolutely required of every True Penitent;) His ſin being lately committed, he cannot have had ſufficient experience of the Firmneſs and Soundneſs of his Repentance. 'Tis a ſtrict Obedience in all our Voluntary actions, to all the Commands of God, and that when our Intereſt and our Pleaſure run counter to them; 'Tis ſuch a ſtrict and Univerſal Obedience that is the only Touch-ſtone to diſtinguiſh between the True and the Falſe Repentance. For how often have we found our Reſolutions of amendment prove ineffectual? And how can we be ſure, unleſs by experience, that our preſent Reſolutions ſhall not be as unſucceſful as our Former? We may truly and ſincerely reſolve to pleaſe God for the future, as the Child, while the delicious Bait is abſent, may heartily promiſe his Father, that he will never offend him again; But

But how know we that this our reſolution is not built on a Sandy Foundation, too weak to ſupport it, when the *Rains*, *the Floods*, *and the Winds*, the violence of Temptations ſhall aſſault it? I doubt not but St. *Peter* did not diſſemble with his Maſter, when he told him ſo briskly, *Though all men ſhould forſake him, yet would not he*; and yet 'tis upon Record how ſhamefully he flew off upon Tryal. Therefore the ſtrength and goodneſs of our Deſires and Reſolutions are beſt known by our Actions. Virtuous Habits in the Soul are to be diſcern'd certainly only by the Acts they produce. This makes Divines commonly ſay, that no man can be ſure that a Death-bed-repentance is valid. This made St. *Auſtin* ſay, *Lib.* 50. *Hom.* 41. *That a Chriſtian living well, goes hence ſecurely. He that repents, and afterwards lives well, goes hence ſecurely. He that repents at laſt, and is abſolved, whether he goes hence ſecurely, I am not ſecure.* Accordingly *Salvian* ſays, *Sera cautione ſpondere aliquid temerarium eſt. It would be a piece of Raſhneſs and Preſumption to give any aſſurance to a Death-bed-Penitent.* This made the ancient Church, as we learn from St. *Cyprian*, refuſe the *Viaticum*, the Sacrament, to perſons that deferred their Repentance till death; for theſe had given no proof of their amendment. And when, after the decay of *Eccleſiaſtical Diſcipline*, they gave it to ſuch, it was *de bene eſſe*, that it might do as much good as it could; but what that would be, God only knew, to man it was wholly doubtful, as we are informed in this famous expreſſion: *Pœnitentiam dare poſſumus, ſecuritatem non poſſumus: We can give them the Sacrament, but that they ſhall receive the benefit deſign'd by it, we cannot aſſure them.* We have but one Inſtance of a dying Penitent, of the ſincerity and ſufficiency of whoſe Repentance

tance we are aſcertain'd; 'tis that of the Thief on the Croſs; and our aſſurance of this is owing to nothing leſs than the Teſtimony of Him who was God as well as Man.

He that, notwithſtanding what has been ſaid, dares venture on a known ſin, hoping to make all well again by a ſpeedy Repentance; I would deſire him to conſider, whether if he had a Son or a Servant that ſhould offend him, eſpecially ſeveral times, preſuming on his kindneſs and good nature; whether, I ſay, he would eaſily and quickly pardon ſuch a Son or a Servant? *Secondly*, whether ſuch a perſon would not ſhew himſelf to be of a very baſe, ungrateful, and diſ-ingenuous temper, and not to be reformed in a little time, or with little pains? Now, why ſhould we fooliſhly imagine, that God will ſuffer his Mercy to be abuſed any more than Man? Or that ſuch a behaviour towards God, does not argue ſo baſe a diſpoſition, as is not quickly to be put off? Let ſuch a perſon but repreſent the Trumpet ſounding, the Son of Man on the Throne, all the Heavenly Hoſt ſurrounding him, and the Books open'd, and Sentence ready to be pronounced; and then let him conſider, whether he could depend on that Mercy which he had ſo lately abuſed, and whether, for all his imaginary Repentance, he would not with amazement and horror be frequently caſting his eyes on that Stain, which he had ſo lately contracted. Such a Prolepſis of the Day of Judgment would ſhew us there is much more danger in one Wilful Sin lately committed, than we are apt to fancy, while we put that day far from us.

But if he that has been guilty of one heinous Indeliberate ſin, or of one Wilful one, in never ſo ſmall a matter, be in ſo dangerous a caſe: What ſhall we ſay to the Oppreſſor and Defrauder of Mankind, to the Cuſtomary Swearer, to the Damner, to the Drunkard, to the Fornicator, to all that wallow in any one habitual ſin? Aſſuredly there is μέγα χάσμα, a great Gulf between Them and Happineſs; They are as far from it, as Heaven is from Hell.

II. But not to grieve our ſelves any longer with ſo melancholly a Subject, I ſhall haſten to give Comfort and Aſſurance to all pious perſons, that for a long time have lived conſcientiouſly in the diſcharge of their duty, and have carefully avoided all Wilful and Deliberate Sins. And the giving this aſſurance is the *proving the ſufficiency of my Rule*, which was the ſecond thing to be done.

For *Theſe are they that have brought forth works meet for Repentance; That have put away the evil of their doings, by ceaſing to do Evil, and by learning to do Well. Iſ.* 16, 17. They deſire nothing more than their Eternal Salvation, and their conſtant Reſolutions are for the Obſervance of all the Commands of God; and then the Conformity of their Outward Actions prove that theſe their Deſires and Reſolutions are ſincere and ſtrong. So that if they look into the Inward Man, they find themſelves renewed in the Spirit of their Minds; and if they take a view of their Outward Actions, they find nothing of the Old. *Now when the wicked forſakes his Way, and the unrighteous his Thoughts; when he*

he turneth from the Wickedneſs that he has committed, and doth that which is Lawful and Right, we are aſſured by *Ezekiel*, that *He ſhall ſave his Soul alive*; and by *Iſaiah*, 55. 7. *That God will have mercy upon him, and will abundantly pardon.* Here it will be asked, what time is neceſſary for the making this experience of ones ſelf? But 'tis impoſſible for one man to determine this for another. Tryals and Temptations are not the ſame to all men in the ſame ſpace of time; nor is all true Chriſtians Intenſeneſs of Obedience equal: for there are degrees even in Sincerity, as there are degrees of Happineſs, ſuitable to them. Wherefore every mans own Conſcience muſt tell him, whether he has been diligent to learn his Duty, and had time to go ſteadily through All or the Main branches of it as they aroſe: Whether he has daily made the Natural and Revealed Will of God the Rule of all his Words and Actions, even when his Pleaſure or his Worldly Intereſt tempted to the contrary. Now, he that has done this, may be reaſonably preſumed proof againſt the fiery Tryal, and the higheſt Temptations, if it be his happineſs to ſuffer for Righteouſneſs-ſake. And then, This is the man, and This only, that upon the Examination of his Life, and the Conſideration of his Ways, can give Peace and Quiet to his Soul; that can ſay with St. *Paul*, *If our earthly houſe of this Tabernacle be diſſolved, we have a building of God, an houſe not made with hands, Eternal in the Heavens.*

But it will not be ſufficient to the Doubting Chriſtian to have thus proved my Rule, unleſs I alſo anſwer his ſcruples; For he will put in, and ſay, I am afraid God has made more things neceſſary than your Rule compri-

ſes; my own Conſcience condemns me, though You do not. I many times have wandring thoughts, and want zeal in my Devotions; I fear I have many ſecret ſins to anſwer for; I often offend through Ignorance and Inconſideration, as I many times diſcover, but too late; and ſome times ill thoughts and imaginations ariſe in my mind: So that I am all over polluted with ſin, and St. *John* has told me, *He that ſinneth is of the Devil, and not of God.*

Theſe, and ſuch-like ſins, if they proceed from our ſloth and negligence, if we do not ſtrive and ſtruggle againſt them, they ſeem to have the conſent of our Wills, and ſo may prove Damnable: but otherwiſe they hardly deſerve the name of Moral Actions. They aro not choſen by our wills, they neceſſarily flow from the Imperfections of our Natures, and ſo are not the proper Object of Laws, nor of Rewards and Penalties. But to ſpeak to the Objections ſeparately: Our Zeal & Warmth in any Action does depend in a great meaſure on the general temper of our bodies, and the particular one we are then in, when we undertake any Action: which temper varies with the Weather, and an hundred other Uncertain cauſes. The holineſs of our Lives, and an humble dependance on God in all our Concerns, does recommend our Prayers more than the Warmth of our Affections, or the Volubility of our Tongues. As for our Thoughts, 'tis no wonder they are deſultory and wandring, ſince the Soul of man cannot bear a continual ſtretch and intention, ſince the variety of Objects are apt to diſtract us, and as it were compel us to mind them. Laſtly, ſince the Multiplicity of Affairs and Buſineſs which God himſelf has impoſed on us, will recur to our minds

minds without our ſeeking. Next, for our ſins of Ignorance and Inconſideration; if we have been honeſtly induſtrious to learn our duty, and watchful to prevent a ſurpriſe where we diſcern'd danger of it, the effects of theſe are unavoidable, and though in themſelves they are deviations from the Laws of God, they ſhall never be imputed as ſuch to us. No good man will puniſh another for that which was inevitable. Then for our ill Thoughts, when by the looſeneſs of our lives we do not give occaſion to them, they have their Natural cauſes, as well as the former: If we do not indulge our ſelves in them, if we do not take pleaſure in them, but diſmiſs them with a *Get ye behind me Satan, you ſavour not the things of God*, they are the Objects of our Virtues, and not our Vices, they are proofs of a reſolute and ſteady Obedience. Wherefore 'tis plain that the Apoſtle in theſe words, *He that ſinneth is of the Devil*, meaneth not ſuch Actions as are owing to the weakneſs of our Nature, but to the Vitioſity of our Wills; Such as the *Gnoſticks* allow'd themſelves in, againſt whom the Apoſtle directs theſe words, and the reſt of this *Epiſtle*. All that the beſt of Chriſtians can do, as to theſe ſins of Infirmity, is to humbly acknowledge them, to ſtrive againſt them, and to beg Gods pardon for them in general. More than this is impoſſible, and that this is enough all Divines agree.

The doubting Chriſtian will reply, I have indeed uſed ſome endeavours to correct the coldneſs of my Prayers, to reſtrain all evil thoughts, to better inform my Judgment, and to prevent all Inconſiderateneſs: but I am ſenſible I have not uſed my utmoſt endeavours; and this, if I loved God as I ought, *with all my heart, with all my ſoul, and with all my might*, I ſhould have done, & ſo ſtill I ſtand condemn'd by my own Conſcience. But

But certainly loving God with all our Heart, and with all our Might, is not with all our Power ſtrain'd to the utmoſt poſſibility; for this would not be to preſcribe a Law to Mankind, but immediately to put them All, how Innocent ſoever, on the Rack, and that the ſevereſt. For the ſtretching the faculties of the Soul to their utmoſt poſſibility, is much more grievous than the diſtention of the Members of the Body. Beſides, there is no way of judging when we have done all that is poſſible, if we take it in that ſtrict ſenſe. Neither *David*, who is ſaid to *have followed God with all his heart*, 1 *Kings* 14.8. Nor *Zecharias* and *Elizabeth*, and others who are ſaid to *have walked in all the Commands of God*, in this of loving God with all the heart, as well as the reſt, ever performed it in this ſenſe. We are told indeed that *Jehu took no heed to walk in the Laws of God with all his heart, becauſe he departed not from the ſins of* Jeroboam, 2 *Kings* 10.31. We are told, *that they that worſhipped ſtrange Gods, did not return to the Lord with all their heart*, 1 *Sam.* 3.7. But we are no where told that he who is careful to avoid all Wilfulneſs, that will forſake his Father or his Mother, his Brother or Siſter, nay his own Life, for the ſake of God; that is, rather than ſin againſt him Knowingly & Willingly: We are no where told, that This man does not love God with all his heart. Nay 'tis probable this way and degree of expreſſing our Love to the Second Perſon of the Trinity now, is but a more clear and diſtinct expreſſion of the Love that was owing to the Firſt Perſon in the Trinity under the Old Law. *David*, who beſt knew what it was to love God with all ones heart, becauſe himſelf was an Example of it, has taught us, *That they ſeek the Lord with their whole Heart, who do no Iniquity*, *Pſal.* 119. 2, 3. that is, Heinous and Deliberate

berate ſins. For *David* knew that himſelf and all Mankind would always have their ſecret ſins, their ſins of Ignorance and Inadvertency.

But the Objector will rejoyn in the third place, Tho' I am conſcious to my ſelf of no wilful Damning ſin, yet for ought I know I am extremely guilty before the great Searcher of Hearts. And St. *Paul* in this is my Precedent, in 1 *Cor.* 4.4. *Though he knew nothing of himſelf, yet,* he ſays, *thereby he was not juſtified.* Wherefore I muſt go down with ſorrow to my Grave: If I am ſaved at laſt, it muſt be by *working out my Salvation with fear and trembling.* And ſo great a man as the forementioned Apoſtle ſays, *He counted not himſelf to have apprehended, but forgetting thoſe things that are behind, and reaching forth to thoſe things that are before, he preſſed towards the Mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus,* Phil. 3. 13.

But you have read the words of St. *John, If your hearts condemn you not, then have you confidence towards God.* You have ſeen St. *Paul's* great confidence & aſſurance, *Henceforth is laid up for me a Crown of Glory.* Wherefore unleſs we will make St. *Paul* contradict himſelf, and one Apoſtle to diſagree with the other, there is but little force in the Objection from the 1*ſt.* to the *Cor.* If you conſult the place, you will find him to ſpeak to ſome that were very apt to cenſure him, as to the diſcharge of his Apoſtolical Function. And to reprove them for the raſhneſs of their cenſures, he tells them how difficult it was to paſs a true Judgment. For ſays he, *I know my own Intentions, my ſecret Thoughts, and all my Carriage, and Behaviour in this matter, and am not conſcious to my ſelf of any failing in it; yet I am not hereby juſtified, for ſome ſlip & omiſſion may be undiſcovered by me, and ſo I may not*

be

be wholly Innocent. And if I may be thus deceived in my own Affairs, how much more likely is it that you ſhould? and therefore judge not. The whole Context runs thus? *But with me it is a very ſmall thing that I ſhould be judged of You, or mans judgment; yea I judge not my own ſelf. For I know nothing by my ſelf, yet am I not hereby juſtified: But He that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come.* But does he ſay, Tho I know nothing by my ſelf, yet I may be ſo far Criminal, as to have brought my ſelf into a ſtate of Damnation? This would come up to the point, but nothing leſs will. To go on then to the other parts of the Objection; 'Tis true St. *Paul* adviſes the *Philippians* to *work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; but this imports only, that they ſhould be careful and diligent in the diſcharge of their Duty; juſt as the ſame Apoſtle bids *Servants to obey their Maſters with Fear and Trembling*; that is, to be careful to pleaſe them. Surely he does not mean, they could not know when they do ſo. As for that other paſſage, that St. *Paul* counted not himſelf to have apprehended, but look'd towards the things that were before, preſſing towards the Mark: What is this, but that he endeavour'd to grow & perſevere in his virtuous courſe, leſt by his after-negligence he might loſe the Prize.

Thus I have given a particular Anſwer to the principal Scruples and Objections that may ariſe in ſome good perſons minds. And now in ſhort I ſhall give a General One to them altogether, which will deaden the force of many more, that are not ſo conſiderable, nor ſo cloſe to my preſent Subject, the mentioning of which would have ſwell'd this Tract beyond its deſigned bounds.

My

My general Anſwer is this: Thoſe conſiderations that would have overthrown the Peace of Conſcience, the Joy and the Comfort of the moſt Godly man that ever was, and that would make our Saviours Yoke extreme uneaſie, they ought not to move any man. Nay they themſelves are faults if they do diſturb us; for they leſſen our Notion of Gods and our Saviours Mercy, and detract from the Goodneſs of the Covenant we are under. Not but that a good man ought to ſtrive againſt theſe ſmaller ſins, nay if he does not, he will find they will lead him inſenſibly into greater: But if he diſquiets himſelf becauſe he has not wholly conquer'd them, he is to blame. Since there are degrees of Glory and Happineſs, the higher our Performances, the greater our Improvements of our Talents; the leſs we have of Infirmities, the nearer we approach to the Perfections of the Almighty, and conſequently the more we ſhall partake of the Happineſs, with which he is bleſſed, for evermore. But if we do not reach the utmoſt height that Humane Nature is capable of, (though that were to be wiſhed) if we bury not our Talent in a Napkin, if we are not among the bad and ſlothful Servants, we ſhall as certainly enter into the Joy of our Lord, as he that had the Ten Cities alloted him, though by reaſon of our ſmaller proficiency, we ſhall have a lower place aſſign'd us. In the Inviſible, as well as the Viſible Heavens, there are Stars of a greater and a ſmaller Magnitude, and theſe are as much in Heaven, though they are not ſo High.

Thus I hope I have given ſatisfaction to the Doubts and Scruples that men are apt to queſtion their Salvation upon, tho' they have lived for a long time in a conſcientious diſcharge of their duty, without the commiſſion of

any one Wilful Sin: And by doing of this I have proved, even to the Doubting Christian, that the Rule I have lay'd down is sufficient to secure any mans Salvation. What has been said may serve also as a proof that we may certainly know our State to Godwards, if we will carefully endeavour it. For 'tis chiefly the fore-going Objections, that make men think it difficult, if not impossible.

But there remains one sort of Objections against this Certainty, and perhaps necessary to be answer'd: They are taken from the words of the *Prov.* c. 20. v. 9. *Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?* As also from those of the *Psalmist, In thy sight no man living shall be justified.* And of *Job.* 9. 20. *If I justifie my self, my own mouth shall condemn me.* These and many more such passages signifie only this, That we are all sinners, and *that if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us*; And that therefore we all stand in need of the Mercy of God, and the Merits of our Saviour. Now, if good men may certainly know that both these belong to them, as they may by the holiness of their Lives, the fore-going Texts may teach us humility, and the necessity of Faith in Christ, but are far from overthrowing the Certainty I contend for.

III. There remains only one thing more to prove my Rule to deserve that name, which is, *that it is plain and easie, such as every man of common sense may apply to himself*; which is the third and last thing to be done. Of which briefly.

If we have been guilty of any Crime, through the violence of our Paſſions, we are ſo far from being ignorant of it, that it will haunt us day and night; it will ſpeak louder than the noiſes of the world, and will thruſt it ſelf into our moſt ſecret retirements; it will ſurprize us like the Paſſion that occaſion'd it, and we cannot get rid of it, would we never ſo fain. Then for wilful ſins, they are of like nature, they will be conſtantly upbraiding us, and flying in our faces. And then if we have any ſenſe of Gods Diſpleaſure, if we have any ſerious Concern for Eternal Happineſs, they will Both hunt us from place to place, till they have driven us into the ſhelter of a ſevere Repentance. And this being done, who cannot tell, whether for a long time together he has diligently avoided the like dangerous ſins? Whether he has lived Righteouſly, Soberly and Godly in this preſent world, not offending againſt his Duty to God or Man? He that has lived thus, why ſhould he the leaſt doubt of his good Eſtate? why ſhould not he give Peace and Comfort to his Soul, ſince he has a Merciful God to deal withal, ſince at the Right hand of God he has an High Prieſt, that feels his Infirmities, and who has alſo told him, *that his Yoke is eaſie, and his Burden is light?*

From what has been ſaid, 'tis plain, that they who obey God, as to the generality of their Actions, but, yet for the gratifying of a Luſt, or the promoting an Intereſt, now and then venture upon a ſinful Action; 'tis plain, I ſay, that they can make no advantage of this my Rule, but to let them ſee the dangerouſneſs of their Condition. For they are ſtill out of the Kingdom of Heaven, though they are not far from it. For they reſemble not the *Merchant that parted with all he had to purchaſe the*